

Chapter 16

Study Skills in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Study skills, as defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), are the “techniques and strategies that help a person read or listen for specific purposes with the intent to remember” (p. 245). With over 34 percent of the world’s, and approximately 79 percent of North America’s, population using the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2012) and the percentage of classrooms in the U.S. that have Internet access increasing from three percent in 1994 to 94 percent in 2005 (Wells & Lewis, 2006), the way that students study and are taught to study must change. To teach study skills, teachers should use the explicit explanation model of reading (Stahl, 1997), which involves the teacher modeling, students practicing with the teacher scaffolding their use of the skills, and then students using the skills independently, using both print and digital texts. This chapter discusses these issues.

INTRODUCTION

Picture this scene that happens in thousands of homes every night: It is 9:00 p.m., Ben is a tenth grader who needs to study for a test he’s having in his American History class tomorrow. He’s in his room, sitting on his bed with his laptop, listening to music downloaded onto his smart phone while also texting on it about a “crisis” that is happening with one of his friends this evening. He also has a

tablet PC beside him on which he has downloaded apps to play games. With all that he has going on digitally, he pulls his American History textbook and spiral notebook out of his backpack and starts to study his notes and chapter readings for the test. He can also access his textbook online through his high school’s website and review the study guide his teacher has posted. After about ten minutes of reviewing his notes and the chapters, Ben goes online to get his teacher’s study guide to review

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and see the enhanced information, such as videos and graphics, which are available with the online textbook. How does this study process compare to those of your students, your children, or even your own study process? As you read this chapter, think about what Ben is doing to prepare for his test and the materials he's using. This chapter will address how Ben and other learners like him could be studying differently to better prepare for tests and the role that teachers play in ensuring students are able to use study skills to enhance their learning.

Upon initial examination, Ben is using some basic study skills to get ready for his test. Study skills, as defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), are the “techniques and strategies that help a person read or listen for specific purposes with the intent to remember” (p. 245). These study skills are often overlooked in early reading instruction and taught as a separate unit of instruction at the secondary level. This process leads students to believe that study skills are isolated from literacy activities or only important for students in the upper grades where content area learning becomes more extensive (for a detailed literature review of study skills, see Richardson, Robnolt, & Rhodes, 2010). However, the world is changing with over 34 percent of the world's, and approximately 79 percent of North America's, population using the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2012) and an increase in the percentage of classrooms in the U.S. with internet access from three percent in 1994 to 94 percent in 2005 (Wells & Lewis, 2006). By 2008, U.S. public schools reported the “ratio of students to instructional computers with Internet access was 3.1 to 1” (Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, 2010, p. 2). In addition to Internet access, Coiro (2003) describes the wide range of texts that students must learn to navigate on the Internet; and even more recently, with the advent of eReaders, researchers note the increased complexities of the continually changing range of devices on which students read (Larson, 2009). Due to these rapid technological changes

in and out of school, the way that students study must change; furthermore, the way that teachers support students to learn to study must shift to meet these technological changes.

BACKGROUND

The authors with colleagues (Robnolt, Rhodes, Abrams, & Richardson, 2012) conducted a study of adolescents' use of study skills with paper-based and digital texts through a survey that was adapted from Rogers (1984). The results indicated that although an overwhelming majority of participants (95.7 percent) reported reading digital texts, for most of the study skills, the participants were more likely to use the study skills with paper-based texts rather than digital texts. Schugar, Schugar, and Penny (2011) found similar results in their study with college freshmen who were given an eReader to use during the semester and reported using study skills, such as highlighting and taking notes, less frequently with the eReader than with traditional paper-based texts. In addition, participants in our study (Robnolt, Rhodes, Abrams, & Richardson, 2012) reported using study skills related to searching for information and comprehending text less frequently than others when reading paper-based or digital texts. In the study by Schugar, Schugar, and Penny (2011), no significant differences were found in the level of text comprehension when reading paper-based texts or eReaders. These results provide implications for instruction at all levels of education.

This chapter will present instructional strategies that teachers can use to assist students to study using both paper-based and digital texts. For students to be able to use the study skills independently, teachers need to model and provide scaffolding through a gradual release of responsibility (Stahl, 1997). Although the increase in Internet access in U.S. classrooms has grown exponentially (Wells & Lewis, 2006) in the last two decades, teachers

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